

**SOCIAL DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE BALANCE
OF TIME FOR PAID WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE IN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE¹**

The aim of the paper is to study the social differences in the attitudes of the balance of time for paid work and private life in European countries. Data from the European Quality of Life Survey — 2016 has been used for the analysis. The applied method is descriptive statistical analysis. The results show that women more often report that their working time fits in well with their family or social commitments compared to men. The respondents in the age interval 30–44 most frequently experience difficulties with the combination of the time for paid work and that for private life. The share of people who reported that the working time does not fit in well at all with their private life is highest among the separated and divorced respondents. The percentage of people who respond negatively to the question if their working hours fit in with the family and social commitments increases with the increase of the number of children. Problems with the reconciliation of the time for paid work and private life experience more often people with lower than secondary education. Good reconciliation of the time for paid work and the time for family and other social commitments is present among the retired people who still work.

Keywords: working time; life-work balance; socio-economic differences; European Quality of Life Survey

Life-work balance is an object of research in the area of quality of life studies. The interest towards it emerges in the context of welfare societies in which the taylorism is replaced by the stronger emphasis on the satisfaction from labor and the way labor activity combines with other spheres of life. In the roots of the life-work concept lays the advancement of the division of labor [1], the separation of the spheres of the modern society [5] and the division between the public and the private sphere [3].

With the development of the post-industrial societies, life-work balance becomes an issue of special importance. In the era of information technologies, the need for fast and timely reaction on the work place and the changes in the labor activities related to the highly qualified work places become sources of tension provoked by the increasing work demands at the expense of leisure time and private life of the individuals. The increased work demands bring about processes of alienation, reduced time for interaction with the family members, reduced time for care for the dependent household members, reduction of activities such as sport and hobbies, less social contacts and weakened sense of attachment to the community.

One of the theories explaining the concept of life-work balance is the *role theory* [4, p. 43–70]. According to this theory, the individual exercises different roles in the sphere of paid work and private life — worker, parent, partner etc.

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The individual engages with these roles and role balance is achieved when full engagement is reached in the fulfillment of the different roles. Role conflict emerges when the individual cannot meet the role expectations, e.g. when the extra-working hours are at the expense of family responsibilities. Role conflicts bring about unbalance between private and professional life and an increased sense of stress and psychological tension due to the unfulfilled role expectations.

The relations between the two sphere of private and professional life go in two directions – not only the long hours of paid work can negatively influence the private life but also the overwhelming family duties can also have a negative impact on the engagement with the paid work. The studies show that the dominant transfer is that from the paid work to the private sphere [2]. The consequences of the unbalance between private and professional life are stress, insufficient engagement at work and at home, decreased quality of life and decreased life satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to outline the social differences in the attitudes towards the life-work balance reflected in the satisfaction from the time for paid work as a component of the subjective wellbeing of the European citizens. For this purpose data from the European Quality of Life Study of Eurofound from 2016 is used.

One of the questions through which life-work balance is measured in the European quality of life survey is: “In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?”. The results show that for almost one fourth (23.4%) of the respondents in the European countries the time for paid work fits in well with their family or social commitments. For 53.8% of the interviewed people it fits in rather well; for 18.8% it fits in rather not well and for 4.1% it does not fit in at all.

On leading positions in the ranking of countries based on the satisfaction from the time for paid work are Sweden, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Denmark

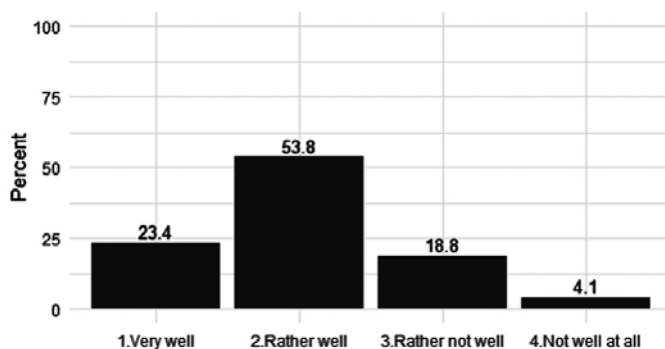


Figure 1. “In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?” (%)

Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

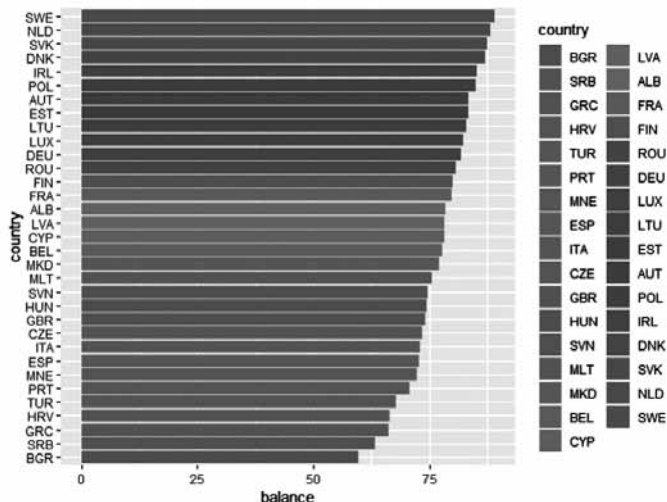


Figure 2. Country ranking of the satisfaction from the time for paid work among people from the countries participating in EQLS

Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

and Ireland. In these countries above 85% of the respondents report that their working time fits in very well or rather well with the other family and social commitments. At the bottom of the ranking are Turkey, Croatia, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. In these countries between 60% and 70% of the interviewed people report that their working time fit in very well or rather well with their engagements in private life. Figure 2 shows that the richest countries in Europe have the highest shares of people whose working time combines well with their private lives. This relation can be explained with the high level of the economic development and social protection in these societies. The Scandinavian countries have corporatist welfare regime. In this regime huge investments are directed towards social protection and wellbeing of the individuals/families. This has a positive effect on life-work balance. On the other extreme are the Balkan countries and the post-socialist countries which have weak social policies and low investments in the systems of social protection. This might have also a negative impact on the labor policies, the working time policies and the entire sphere of paid work.

Women in the European countries more often report that their working time fits in well with their family or social commitments compared to men - 24.2% of the women and 22.5% of the men respond that the time for paid work fits in very well. For slightly above 50% of men and women the time fits in rather well. Approximately one fourth of the respondents from both sexes respond that the time for paid work does not fit in very well. It does not fit in well at all for 4% of men and women.

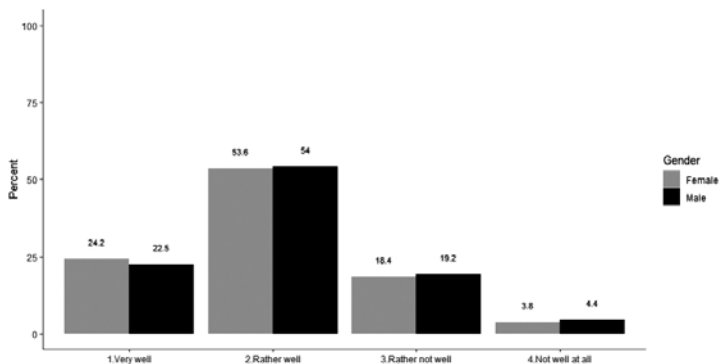


Figure 3. "In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?" by gender (%)

Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

The distribution by age shows that the respondents in the age interval 30-44 most frequently experience difficulties with the combination of the time for paid work and that for private life. In other words, the respondents who are in the most active part of their lives, experience more frequently difficulties in the reconciliation of the time for paid work and the time for family responsibilities. The highest percentage of the answers that the time for paid work combines well with the time for family and other social commitment is registered among the respondents above 50 years. Almost every third person from the respondents above 50 years (27.8%) reports that the working time fits in well with the family or social commitments.

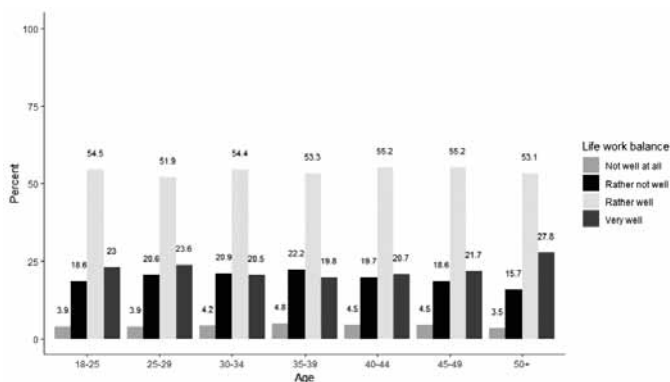


Figure 4. "In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?" by age (%)

Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

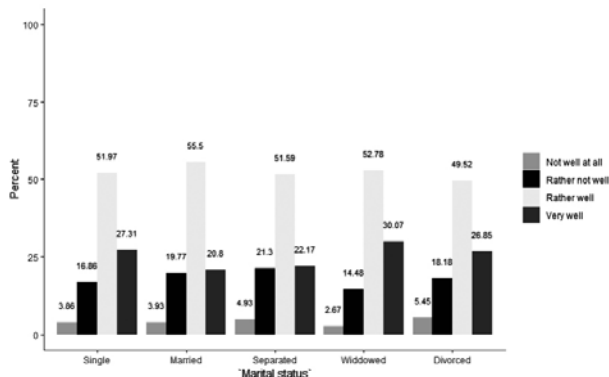


Figure 5. “In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?” by marital status (%) *То же замечание*
Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

The distribution by marital status shows that people who are married, separated or divorced slightly more frequently report that the working time does not fit in well with their family and social engagements — from these groups every fifth respondent shares this opinion. The share of people who reported that the working time does not fit in well at all with their private life is highest among those who are separated and divorced (approximately 5%).

The percentage of people who respond negatively to the question if their working hours fit in with the family and social commitments increases with an increase of the number of children. Respectively, 3% from the respondents without children and two times more among those with three or more children

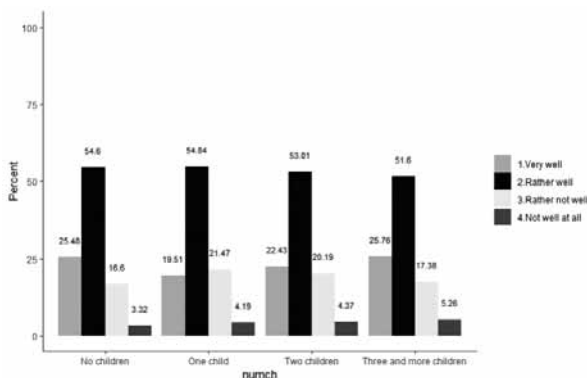


Figure 6. “In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?” by number of children (%)
Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

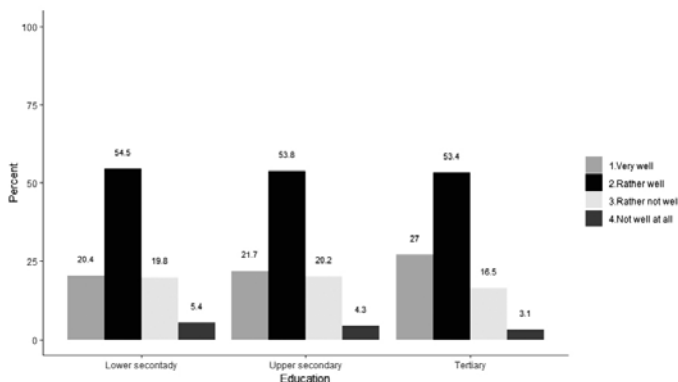


Figure 7. *“In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?” by education (%)*

Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

report that the time for paid work does not fit in well at all with their duties and responsibilities in private life.

Problems with the reconciliation of the time for paid work and private life experience more often people with lower than secondary education. 5.4% of respondents in this category report that they experience significant difficulties to combine the time for paid work and private life. Among the people with tertiary education this share is almost two times lower — 3.1%. Almost every third person from the people with tertiary education reports that his/her working time fits in very well with the family and social commitments. Among the respondents with secondary education this share is a little bit lower — approximately 20%.

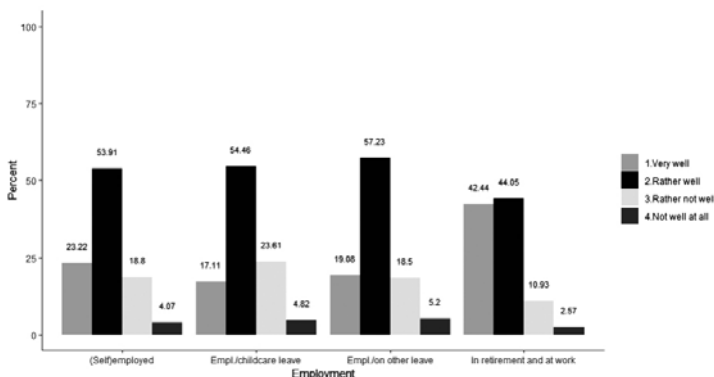


Figure 8. *“In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?” by employment status (%)*

Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Eurofound, author's estimates

There is a difference in the answers of the respondents by labor status. The results from the study show that good reconciliation of the time for paid work and the time for family and other social commitments is present among the retired people who still work (42.4%). Most likely these are people who work part time or have flexible working time which allows for good reconciliation between paid work and private life.

The conclusion that we can draw is that strong differences exist in Europe in regard to life-work balance and particularly, to the satisfaction with the time for professional life and the way it combines with private life. In the poor countries in Europe, like the Balkan countries, the levels of satisfaction from the working time are lowest. In the richest European societies like the Scandinavian countries in which more flexible forms of labor are spread out and the social systems ensure high social protection of the individuals, the positive evaluation of the balance between the time for paid work and the time for private life is highest. Socio-economic differences between the countries in Europe have important consequences for the quality of labor, the quality of family life and the overall subjective wellbeing of the European citizens.

Author

Dimitrova Elitsa Kuzdova — researcher, PhD, associate professor Institute for Population and Human Studies — Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Acad. Goergi Bonchev str. Bl. 6 Fl. 6 Sofia 113 Bulgaria. E-mail: elitsa_kdimitrova@yahoo.com

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